

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
NORTH ADAMS**

**INFORMANT: EMMA M. GOULD
INTERVIEWER: STEWART BURNS
DATE: MAY 25, 1988
LOCATION: ST. JOSEPH'S COURT APARTMENTS**

**S = STEWART
E = EMMA**

SG-NA-T016

I'm interviewing Emma Gould at her apartment at St. Joseph's Court on Eagle Street in North Adams. And today's date is May 25, 1988. And this is for Shifting Gears. And my name in case you didn't get it is Stewart Burns.

S: Okay.

E: Okay!

S: The first question I have is about, if you could tell me about your, your grandparents and parents. You know, where they came from and (--)

E: Oh my grandparents, my grandparents, I never knew them. They were in Italy. I only had one picture of my grandmother, but that's the only thing I could tell you about my grandparents. They were in, right in Italy all of the time and I never saw them.

S: And what about your parents? Did they grow up in North Adams?

E: Oh my parents um, oh yeah! Yeah, oh no no. They grew up in Italy.

S: Your parents did on both, on both sides?

E: Both sides, yeah, my mother and my father. Um, in the Province of [Povia?], [Vogada?] was the name of the little town. [S: Oh!] Vogada. Am I going to be all right like this? [S: Oh yeah.] See because I don't talk directly into this thing.

S: Oh no, that's fine. There's you know, there's plenty, plenty of [unclear].

E: [Laughs] Okay, good. Yeah!

S: And did you grow up in North Adams?

E: North Adams. Oh yeah, I was born here in North Adams.

S: You were born here. What year were you born?

E: 1912.

S: 1912.

E: Columbus Day, October 12, 12 and 1912.

S: My sister was born on October 11th.

E: Is that right! Oh!. That's why I'm surprised my parents didn't call me Columbina. [S: Uh huh!] You know, being born on Columbus Day. [S: Right, right] Cause I'm sure if I was a boy I would have been named Columbio. [S: Uh huh!] Yeah. [Laughs] Yeah!

S: And what was your family's name?

E: My mother's name (--)

S: [Few words unclear] your original name?

E: Montagna. [S: Montagna] Montagna, yeah, yeah, yeah. That means mountain in Italian.

S: That's a wonderful name.

E: And now they go [says name with English accent] Montagna, but [says name with Italian accent] is more musical, isn't it?

S: Oh yes!

E: Yeah. I had a Latin teacher that told me that. I don't know why she says, you want to be called [English accent] Montagna, she said, when [Italian accent] Montagna is such a beautiful name.

S: Oh yeah!

E: So after that I always went by Montagna. But a lot of them say, who? I said, [English accent] Montagna, then they know. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

S: And where did you grow up in North Adams?

E: Right here in North Adams and I was born on State Street. [S: Uh huh] And then I moved up to Furnace Street [S: uh huh] and I lived there on Furnace Street sixty-three years [S: Oh my god!] before I came down here. [S: Oh my god!] Yeah, come off the hill. Beautiful (--)

S: So you were, you were a little girl when you moved up the hill?

E: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. From State Street up to Furnace, yeah.

S: And that's quite a, that's quite an Italian community [unclear], mostly Italians.

E: Oh yeah, at one time it was all Italians. Now of course it's different. They got everybody and their aunt and uncle.

S: I know.

E: But I know at one time I could tell you who lived where, because they were all Italians. But no more now. Of course now I'm down here so I have a new clientele. [Laughs] I got a lot of neighbors here. I do like it here though. [S: That's {unclear}] I've become accustom to it. [S: Oh yeah.] But you have too. [S: yes] Yeah.

S: And then did you go to Drury High School?

E: Oh yeah. I went to Sarah T. Hanscom School, but before that I went to a little school that was right up on the hill there. Right where, where I was living on State Street and up behind the house they had a school. And the place is still there. They're using it as uh, apartment houses now. And uh, still the old school house, they still call it the old school house. But I, I don't remember what name it went by. I went to kindergarten there. And then they [unclear] the Sarah T. Hanscom School, and then I went down there. And then from there I went to [Braintenville?] School, and from Braintenville I went to [Mark Hopton's], and Mark Hopton's I went to Drury.

S: What was Drury like?

E: Oh it was wonder, it was nice. I was nice. Compare to today it was nice, yeah. Yeah, it was nice.

S: It must have been a lot smaller.

E: Oh yeah, the classes. I can't remember how big a class we had, but uh, I graduated in 1931 [S: wow!] from there, yup.

S: And then did you, did you get a job right after that?

E: No, I waited a couple of years and then I, because I started working in 1934. [S: Uh huh] I kind of helped my (--) I had to (--) My mother was quite sick and I use to help with her, yeah.

Yeah, and then I went to work. Yeah. So!

S: And then was Sprague the first job that you, you had?

E: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

S: What, so that would have been about 1934?

E: 1934. Yeah, I put that down, I got it. [S: great] I started in 1934 and I ended in 1974. [S: Uh huh] That's forty years. [S: Hm] And I've been retired thirteen years. [S: Boy!] It doesn't seem it. [S: Wow!] It seems like I just retired. I've enjoyed every bit of it. I love that. I love it. Getting lazy, fat, getting fat and lazy. [Both laugh]

S: What, what plants did you work in?

E: I worked at the Brow, the Beaver Street plant and the Brown Street. I never did work at Marshall Street plant. [S: No?] Never. Yeah, I spent all of those years in those two plants. It started up at the Beaver.

S: In what, what departments?

E: A wax, well I called it, it was a waxing department. We used to uh, fill tubes [S: uh huh] cardboard tubes with wax. [S: Umhm] First there used to be the black wax, there's my mark right here. [S: Oh boy!] Because everybody that worked in black wax has a mark on them.

S: Really, the burns.

E: From the burns, from the burns. And this is my scar from here. I was out of work quite awhile, because it ate, the black wax ate right into the bone. Yeah, I was out quite awhile from work.

S: Had you been working a long time when that happened, or was that (--)

E: Yeah, no, I'd been working a few years on it, yeah.

S: When that happened you had only been working a few years.

E: Yeah, yeah. So after that they furnished us with uh, smocks, with long sleeve smocks. [S: Umhm] That, or with the high gloves, rubber gloves so you wouldn't get burned. But I'll tell you everybody that had worked on black wax has a scar on them. Yup.

S: Do you think that it wasn't as safe as (--)

E: No. Well it wasn't safe [S: unclear]. Nowadays they would never allow that. [S: Umhm] Never allow a set-up like that.

S: So you didn't have any protection?

E: No, not really, not really, until they furnished us with these smocks. It protected uh, your neck in the front and your arms.

S: Umhm.

E: But you could have got burnt on the hands. And then they, then they gave the gloves out.

S: Was it because so many people got burned that (--)

E: I don't know if that was the reason, but I know that the smock is because so many of them got burnt on their arms. You know, the condensers would pop up. We'd have them on racks like, and we'd put them in the rack. And sometimes the, when you'd put them in the rack, the thing would let go. [S: Oh!] And this is when, you never knew. [S: Oh, of course] You never knew when it was going to pop.

S: And it was full of wax?

E: Oh yeah, full of hot wax.

S: Full of hot wax.

E: Yeah. And then, in the end they, I guess they turned out to be capacitors, or I don't know. It was some kind of uh, yeah, yeah.

S: Boy! Now then (--) I just want to get a sense [E: yeah, right} first of where you worked and then we'll go back [rest of sentence unclear-informants voice over-powers interviewers voice].

E: Yeah, oh sure, sure.

S: So when did you start working at Brown Street?

E: Oh, geezers, I don't remember!

S: Was it during World War II, or?

E: No, during World War II I was still up on the Beaver. I was still up on the Beaver, because I know we had to go in at Christmas and New Years. [S: Oooh!] That's why I know, because I went to a New Years party, and right from the party I went to work all dressed up with my dangles and spangles on. And a few drinks in me and [laughs], and I know I went right to work. And that's why I remember I was up on the Beaver. Yeah. So actually the year that I went down Brown Street I really can't remember.

S: Yeah, but it was after the war? [E: Oh yeah, yeah] So it might have been 1950's?

E: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

S: And then what, what was your job? What department and what job?

E: Down on Brown Street? I did everything down there. I worked on production. I did a little clerical work. And uh, actually I, when I first went down I worked in the resistor department. [S: Oh] We used to color code [S: Oh!] little resistors. They had the machine then. In fact, I, and thre(--) I can't remember who the other, there was three others that started there. We started the color code. We were separated from the rest of the group, [S: Oh!] and when they were experimenting with the color code. [S: Oh!] And they had uh, say four or five colors on tubes. You had to put them on the machine and they would tran (--) [S: Oh!] Go on to this little resistor and color code the whole resistor. Too close? [questioning whether she's speaking too close to mike]

S: And you were the first ones to actually [unclear]?

E: Actually, yes, yes. I and three other girls. [S: Umhm] Yeah. Yeah.

S: So going back to what it was like when you first started working, can you just sort of go through what a typical day was like when you, you know, [E: a typical day?] or what, what you did during the day?

E: Yeah, during the (--) Okay. A typ (--) This, now this is, I'm going back, way back when I first started.

S: This would be your first job. Yeah, that's [unclear].

E: Up on the Beaver Street. [S: Right] A typical day would be (--)

S: If there is a typical day [unclear].

E: There was not really. No typical day, because you go in for seven o'clock. You could have worked two or three hours, and they would send you home [S: Uh huh] because there was no work. You might, could have been home maybe an hour or two, then you got a call to go back up to work again. And this happens several times, quite a few times.

S: And you lived quite far away?

E: Yeah! I lived uh, hey, across town. Across town.

S: From one hill.

E: Yeah, [S: to the other] to the other hill. Yeah. Across town.

S: So you had to walk [all the way]?

E: Oh yeah, we used to walk. Yeah. Yeah.

S: So that must have taken half an hour or so each way.

E: Oh yeah, oh yeah, yeah. Right, right. And of course you never new when you, this was going to happen. Of course this was before the unions. This was before the unions. Because after the unions, well they had to guarantee you four hours work. [S: Okay] If you didn't get the four hours and were sent home, you still got paid [S: oh] for the four hours work, whether you worked or not.

S: Now when you started working in 1934, was it mostly women who worked in production?

E: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

S: Were there very few, very few men?

E: They had a few men. The men, most of them were like service men, [S: Umhm] or a supervisor, or foreman, but none of them was really on the production. It was all women, all women. [S: Umhm] And when I started I was getting thirty-two cents an hour. And before that, the ones that started were getting only twenty-eight cents. The ones when they first started up there, they were getting twenty-eight cents an hour. Yeah, yeah. Then like I say, and then you only work three or four hours, [S: right] went home, had to come back. It was a see-saw game. Hey, really.

S: Did you have any benefits when you first starting working?

E: No, no, [S: No] no. Not when you first worked, no. The benefits started coming when they got the unions in really.

S: Which was in the late, late thirties?

E: I, I would say so. I really don't remember when the union (--)

S: Yeah, you had been there a few years.

E: Yeah, yeah. [S: Yeah] I've been on a few picket places. [Laughs]

S: Yeah, well I want to, I want to ask you about that. [At least a little later?]

E: That didn't uh, that to me was a stupid thing, because you never got back, you never got what you want, wanted. In fact, we went back one of the times for the picket, because we felt sorry for one of the big shots who was taken sick. So I just missed his shug. [S: Unclear] And we went back to work at a loss, at a loss!

S: Because you felt sorry [unclear]?

E: Yeah, well they felt, and they had a collection for him and everything. A big shot.

S: And that's why you went back?

E: Yeah, yeah. We were stupid! [Laughs]

S: Now, now this would have been one of the very first strikes?

E: Oh yeah, yeah. That was one of the first strikes, yeah.

S: Like probably before World War II maybe?

E: Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. But that was something really.

S: So if you could (--) Could you go back to what it was like on a typical day, or if there is such a thing?

E: No, like I say there was no typical day. Because you went in one day and you didn't know what was going to happen. The next day maybe you worked all day, you had enough work for all day, but uh (--)

S: But you would be working on that, on the wax.

E: Oh yeah, oh yeah. That's right, I worked on the wax right along. Yeah.

S: And can you just say what, what you actually did on typical days?

E: Well we'd fill up these little cardboard circular tubes like, and fill them up with this wax. And then you had to set them [E: umhm] on these racks to cool off. [S: Umhm] And then someone else would put in the wires after you know, the [S: oh I see.] conductors or what you want to call it.

S: So what you did was sort of the first step, [E: first step] [unclear].

E: Yeah, yeah. We got them from the ones that (--) Where they were making the tubes, I don't know. But I know we filled up the tubes with wax. And then later on they had had this by-wax, which was uh, a yellow kind of wax. [S: Uh huh] And they went from the black to the by-wax. I guess testing they found the by-wax held up better than the black wax. [S: Umhm] Yeah. Yeah. But like I say, everyday you didn't know.

S: What was it like working with the other women? Was it, were you [unclear] [E: Oh, it was pleasant] friends with [unclear]?

E: Oh yeah, you were friends. Very friend, very friendly. Except one time, uh, of course you were on an incentive program. [S: Umhm] The more work you put out the more money you got. So of course at one time they use, they never used to post the percentage. Then they start

posting the percentage of what you made and what percent I made. And then after that there was quite a bit of bickering.

S: Oh, because they didn't think it was accurate, or?

E: No, because this one got all the best work, that's how she made so much more percent than you did.

S: You mean the best work meaning different kinds of condensers, different sizes and (--) [E: Yeah, yeah, right] Plus some condensers were easier to make, [E: to do than others] but were the bigger ones easier, or the smaller ones?

E: No, to me the smaller (--) See, well this is it. It all depended on the worker. A lot of them liked the big ones. I never did. I always made good on the small ones. [S: Oh, I see.] So when my percentage would go up, say fifty percent for the week, hey then they'd all fight, they want to do the small ones, because those are the best ones. She's getting all of the best work, and this and that. But this happened after they posted them. And then they discovered that was making too much trouble, so they discontinued.

S: They stopped posting it?

E: They, yeah, they stopped posting.

S: But they still kept the bonus system.

E: Oh yeah, oh yeah, but no one knew what you made or what I made, [S: Oh, oh] unless you told them. If you wanted to start a little fight, all you got to say, "geeze I made 75% this week". That would start a fight. [S: Oh] But otherwise we all got along good. And we had parties you know. And we would sing and fool around. You know, talk and laugh.

S: You were able to do that during work?

E: Oh yeah, oh yeah, yeah.

S: Because it was pretty, a pretty relaxed [E: Oh yeah, yeah] atmosphere?

E: Really, it was, it was.

S: Then during lunch, lunch hour, (--)

E: Lunch hour, you had your lunch hour and you had (--)

S: So you all kind of hung around together.

E: Yeah, yeah. They had areas where you could eat. And then eventually they had a cafeteria. Yeah. Yeah. They ran the cafeteria. It was a family that ran the cafeteria.

S: Oh, and someone told me that it was quite good food.

E: Yeah, yeah, yup. Yeah.

S: And someone told me that, that you had dancing, uh, some kind of dancing during the lunch hour? Was that Beaver Street (--)

E: Because we had music.

S: Yeah, music yeah.

E: That was up the (--) Yeah, you want to dance, see they had the music. They did have music all day long. [S: Oh] Yeah. But some of them like the music and some didn't.

S: What kind of music was it?

E: Well it was uh, some fast, some slow.

S: Like the popular?

E: Yeah.

S: The popular music of the day.

E: Music at the time. But a lot of people didn't like the music.

S: They didn't like music at all, or they didn't like that [unclear]?

E: They didn't like music while they were working.

S: Oh, because it was kind of distracting?

E: Well I guess so, I don't know. But I know I enjoyed the music. [S: Oh yeah] I still enjoy it now too. I'm just mad I don't, can't get up and dance no more. [Laughs] Yeah. And they used to sing along with the song. You know, it passed the time of the day. [S: Oh yeah] And you're still working, you're still putting out your work. [S: Right] Cause when you're on an incentive program, hey, you're working there to make money. Yeah.

S: So do you think it would have been better if the bonus system didn't exist?

E: Didn't (--) Well, it did in one way, but in another way like I said, you put out more with the bonus, you got more money. [S: yeah] Of course you were all there to work for money, aren't you?

S: Yeah. [E: Yeah] So I guess it would depend on each person.

E: Yeah, right.

S: Because some of the people might not want to have to work that hard, where as someone else might want to (--)

E: No, because I, in my later years I didn't want any bonus work. [S: yeah] I didn't want (--) I always looked for a day work job, [S: yeah] because (--) They call it a day, you know (--) And you knew what your pay was going to be at the end of the week [S: right, right], every week, and you could plan on it. [S: Right] Instead with the bonus incentive, hey, you never knew what you were going to get. And then you were always questioning them whether it was so, or not. You know, you say, well they made a mistake. I made more than that. And yeah.

S: Who kept track of that?

E: The office girls, the one, the girls, the clerks. The ones that worked in the clerk.

S: So when you would, when you would make, each condenser that you made, somebody would, would make a note of who made that condenser, or?

E: Well at the end of the week, see, they would uh, they'd add it up or whatever. I don't know how they did work it.

S: Somebody must have kept track of each, each persons (--)

E: Of each person, oh yeah.

S: That must have been quite a book keeping.

E: What the production was, yeah.

S: Quite a book keeping. I can see where they could probably make mistakes easily.

E: Oh very easily. Very easily. Especially with the percentage and everything.

S: Oh yeah, that seems really.

E: Because a couple of times I worked in the office, the clerk was sick. And they say, "well why don't you go in their job". I say, "I never done it before. Hey, I'm not that smart". Oh but I used to hang around with the girl that was the desk, we call, we used to call them desk clerks then. I don't know what they call them now. Must be a fancy name, but at the time it was the desk clerk. And she took care of the, of the time, your time for the day. If you worked seven hours, eight hours, you would have to itemize that up every day, how many hours. See, every morning they would take the cards, the cards from the punch clock and total up their hours. And see, some, maybe some worked six hours, some worked eight hours, some worked seven hours. And then at the end of the week they would total up all of their hours. Cause, and I was friendly

with the girl that worked in the office. That's why I was always in there with her. I'd go in and have lunch with her. She was kind of a crippled girl. And this was down Brown Street. And they say, "well you've done it, you've seen Ruth do it." So this is when I started. Whenever she was out sick they'd send me in there. And I says, "oh, gee." So what they used to give me the pay of the desk clerk. But every time I went in, if it was even for one day, I would have to make out a paper, a report of what I did that day in the office. Then they would transfer me into the office. Then when I come back out the next day I was on my regular production. [S: Oh boy!] It was a mess. So in the end they, they had me go over to Brown Street to take a test. Now I type with two fingers. [S: Me too] They even had me take a typewriting test! I said, "I don't type!" "I type two fingers." "You still have to take it." I said, "oh, for god sake." So I typed two fingers, but I typed a quarter of what I was suppose to have typed. But everything I typed was correct. And she said, "you didn't pass the typing test." I said, "that doesn't surprise me at all, because I never had typewriting in uh, I never typed!" I never had a lesson in typewriting. This is ridiculous. Uh, you didn't pass. Of course I didn't pass. I was over there one whole afternoon over Marshall Street. [S: boy] And then I had to uh, the arithmetic and all this percent. That's why I was lousy in algebra. I was lousy. [S: boy] I was lousy. But I had to go to the percentage table and this and that. Hey, I've been out of high school how many years? I don't know if it was twenty years I was out of high school. And they expect me to do (--) I did pretty good at the rest of the test. [Chuckles] I was surprised, really. Yeah!

S: Now was the pay better for a clerical worker?

E: Well, oh yeah. Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. And of course (--)

S: But you didn't want to do that? Did you?

E: I didn't want to do that, because (--)

S: No, even if you made more money.

E: Yeah, no, I didn't want to do. I just wanted a simple day work job. And in the end, when I retired, I said, if I knew that I would have this job when I'm ready to retire, I would retire, have retired at the time. But you didn't know how long the job was going to be there. That was um, I worked in the cutting machine room they called it. You um, had to take measure (--) And it covered the three different departments. You had to cut paper for them, where they used the papers as insulators. And some of them they rolled around on the rolling machine. They had to use the papers. And I'd, it was for four different departments. And it was all by foot. You had the, the big machine, all by foot. [S: Oh boy] The big cutting machine, yeah.

S: Hm. Does that take a lot of concentration?

E: Oh yeah, because hey, you could easily got your finger caught under that big blade too. [S: Oh boy!] Yeah. But you knew, I knew what my pay was going to be at the end of the week, because it was on uh, say I got a dollar and a half an hour. Well I knew what my pay was going to be at the end of the week and I would plan on that. Where on the uh, when you're on the incentive program, [S: right] you cannot plan. [S: Right] Because sometime you might do it

and sometimes you might not do it.

S: And some of it, some of it's out of your control too, [E: oh right] because they might make a mistake, or they might, [E: oh, well this is it] they might give you bigger condensers, or small condensers.

E: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

S: So when you were at, when you were at, at Beaver Street before the war, in those first two years when you started.

E: Yeah, I worked in the waxing department. I worked just in that one department.

S: What was it like? What was it like with the supervisors? Did you get along okay with the supervisors?

E: Some of them, some of them.

S: Okay. Did they cause trouble some time, or make things (--)

E: Well you know, it was the person you think that is making trouble, that he's got a favorite. [S: Umhm] You know, this "oh, you got a favorite" "You're the boss' favorite."

S: Because they were men and you were all women then.

E: Right, right, Yeah, we were all women. All women, yeah.

S: And they probably were a little older than (--)

E: Hm. Some of them. Some of them weren't really. They had some young ones there, yeah.

S: Was there any kind of like, rivalry between the women to get favor [unclear]?

E: Oh no, no. I wouldn't, I know in my department I can't say that. That they favored one more than the other. I can't say that he did.

S: Yeah, but it might have seemed that way to some.

E: It might have seemed to some of them, but I never uh, (--)

S: So they were mostly, do you think they were mostly pretty fair supervisors then?

E: Oh yeah. I, I would say so. I would say so. Of course, like I said, it all depended on your foreman and your supervisor. And I had, to me I had very good foremen and very good supervisors. Yeah. I always got along with them, except one. And uh, this is when we were first starting on this color code machine. These resistors.

S: So this would have been at Brown Street?

E: Yeah. And uh, we were starting it up. And uh, so we had all agreed. Because see, they were getting it ready for the incentive program. So were, kept cutting down, you know, on the amount that we were putting out. We didn't want to put out too many. Because then when they started with the incentive program, they would add on to what we were putting on. So like I said, there was four of us doing this. And three of us, we all decided that we weren't going to put out more than say, twenty thousand a day. And the fourth machine was putting out a lot more than the other three machines. So the foreman called us up at his desk and wanted to know how come? That three machines weren't putting out as much as the fourth machine. This is when we found out the other two girls were going over. Otherwise we didn't know what was going on, but we found out, because they were putting out more. Because we were the ones that had started that. And these other two came on after we got the thing started. You know, the machines going, the colors and everything. Yeah. So this one, we discovered that they were putting out more, that you know, and they discovered that we could put out more. [S: Umhm] And he wanted to know what the trouble was. But that, but he was very nice about it all we remember about him when I think of him. But he, very soft spoken fellow. He wasn't rough or anything. Very soft spoken, very nice about it. Yeah. So we told him, we told him just what was going on. We knew it was going to go on bonus, so we were trying to keep it down so the bonus wouldn't be so high. [Laughs] And I said, "we get along together." But it was just that we had agreed. And I said, "and they're the ones that are spoiling it all for everybody else." "And I hope that they get stuck on the job and that they take me off of it, if that's what they want." Yeah. Yeah.

At the time I wasn't really quite outspoken, but hey, I learned. The more I worked there the more outspoken I got, really. Because even in high school I was very timid. Very timid! Cause even in my class book it mentioned about me being timid. And they say, "boy, what happened?"

S: Why do you think it was that you became more out spoken?

E: Well because otherwise um, they would not pick on you. Like I say, they would uh, try to put blame on you for other things. [S: Oh, oh] For things that happened, you know, yeah.

S: So you really had to speak out [unclear].

E: Oh yeah, you had to speak up. I mean cover yourself [S: Umhm] Right. They were all of my friends. They were still my friends, really, yeah. No, at the time (--) And of course when I retired I really did like to work. And like I said, if I was sure that I would have stayed in this one room cutting papers (--) Of course they had a fancy name for it. I don't know what it is now, but uh, I would have stayed. I wouldn't have quit at sixty-two. I would have stayed. But I wasn't sure how long the job was going to go.

S: And it probably didn't last that much longer.

E: No it didn't. It didn't.

S: Maybe a few more years.

E: Yeah, oh yeah, yeah. But it didn't. Yeah, yeah.

S: Now did the situation at Sprague's change a lot during World War II? Did the war bring about changes in what it was like working at Sprague's?

E: Well I don't know, because like I say, I never had any problems working. [S: Umhm] You've had your arguments and you know, and then I forget about it. But uh, I don't, I couldn't say that in the department that I worked in.

S: So really it seemed to continue to be pretty much the same thing.

E: Yeah, because we still used to sing and we still used to have our little parties. And (--)

S: So that stayed pretty much the same all of the way, all the way through to when you retired?

E: All the way. All the way through, yeah.

S: So it didn't, it didn't, the work didn't speed up a whole lot, or (--)

E: Well a lot of the work changed. [S: Changed, yeah] Of course I didn't know about it, because I didn't have nothing to do with these changes. [S: Yeah] A lot of the work did change. And departments, they got moved from one floor to another. And then I worked in the [Sandia?] Department, which was a very very fussy department. You had to wear gloves, white gloves. You couldn't handle the unit without gloves on. And we had to solder them. It was the Sandia Department they called it.

S: What does that mean?

E: Um, uh, I don't know.

S: Is that the name, is that the name of another company?

E: That, that this uh (--)

S: I know this a Sandia Corporation.

E: Yeah, well this was part of the Sandia, see. And they gave like part of it to Sprague, to roll, to make these condensers. And we used uh, (--). And then every now and then they would have inspectors from Sandia come in. It had to be air conditioned. Had to be air conditioned. And no dust at all, no dust at all. And every time, even if you ate an orange or any, you had to wash your hands, because they would know who had an orange with the test. I don't know how they knew it. But they knew. There was some object in the [unclear], or condenser [S: oh boy] or the unit that said, somebody had an orange here.

S: Do you know what these condensers were used for?

E: I don't know, I have no idea. I never asked questions when there. Yeah, but I know it was very fussy. Very fussy. A lot of soldering with the iron. And then, then you had them on the, a machine where you had to solder the outside of the can. [S: Umhm] But that was more or less separated from any of the other production. [S: Oh] More or less separated. Yeah, yeah.

S: And you didn't soldering?

E: And I did soldering on the machine on there, and I did the soldering of the holes. And they had to be just so big. It was very very fussy. Very fussy. And you had to crimp the wires, you know? And then solder and not have any solder get inside the can. [S: Hm] This is what you, (--) Oh it was a very fussy job. Yeah. [S: Hm] Yeah. And see, now that was on a day work uh, program when it first started. But before you knew it they put it on an incentive program. And they used to have a lot of rejects. Cause they're trying to hurry up. That was a job you could not hurry on. [S: Hm] Yeah, yeah. Oh I've gone in and worked on Saturdays on Sandias. Worked all day Saturdays too. [S: Hm] Yeah. And I never went for Saturday work, because it always put me into another bracket, [S: with taxes?] with the taxes. [S: Oh] And in the end, the end of the week, when I worked on a full week plus, that's forty-eight hours. [S: Hm] I would end up by making three or four dollars more, that's all. Cause I went into another bracket, took our more money. So the only time I went in on Saturday is when I was forced to go in. [S: Oh] Cause see a lot of girls like to work on Saturdays on account of the extra time, but I figured hey, forty hours was enough for me. So then my supervisor would come over, or the foreman would come over and say, "Emma, you've got to come in on Saturday." I said, "I don't like to come in on Saturdays." And they knew it. He said, "the other girls are complaining because you're the only one that doesn't come in. So then I would have to go in, but I didn't like it, I didn't like. Forty, to me forty hours was enough. Yeah.

S: Did the time go by pretty fast when you were working?

E: Oh it did, it did! It really went by fast.

S: Cause you were just concentrating on (--)

E: Because you know, yeah, and then I mean you would talk, you would laugh, you would sing.

S: You were working close?

E: And you were working (--) Oh, very close.

S: Close. Like would you sit a tables?

E: Oh yeah, oh yeah. yeah.

S: So you'd sit a long tables with other women doing [unclear].

E: Yeah, except when you're on the machine. They had the machines all in a row. [S: Umhm] And then uh, and then a couple of machines though, when you soldered the outside, they were separated, but the ones that assemble the condensers into the cans, they were all at the same table. Yeah.

S: So what (--) Do you feel like it was really hard work, or [unclear].

E: Oh, it was difficult work. The Sandia, the Sandia work was.

S: What about the rest of the work? Was that (--)

E: The rest of the work, no it wasn't. To me it wasn't.

S: Yeah, because you really, you learned how to do and it's always the same things.

E: Yeah, right, right. Over and over and over again. Yeah.

S: Did it get boring?

E: No, but like I said, we always used to talk.

S: Yeah, so you could(--)

E: You know, you were able to talk and do your work at the same time. [S: Yeah, yeah] Yeah, cause, and we were close enough.

S: So nobody ever told you that you couldn't talk during [unclear].

E: No, no. No, no, no. No, not all of the time that I worked there. Yeah.

S: So it felt (--) It didn't feel like there was somebody always over your shoulder?

E: No, pushing, no, or pressuring you, no.

S: You felt like you were (--)

E: Yeah, you're on your own. The more you put out the more you made. You know, it was up to you. Of course every now and then they'd tell us, you spend too much time in the ladies room. We'd go out and smoke and forget to go back. But you know, hey, that's hurting my job, that's hurting my money. If I don't mind losing the five or ten dollars a week, I don't know why it bothers someone else. [S: Umhm] They said, "well you're spending too much (--)

S: So if you went, if you went to the ladies room would you have to take your, take your time card?

E: Oh no. No, no. No, no. No. No. No. But when you're on the incentive the longer you are

away the less you make.

S: Oh I see, I see. Right.

E: Then you work like hell to make up for the time you lost when you were out in the ladies room. [Laughs] Yeah. Yeah.

S: Were you involved in the strikes? I know there was a strike I think in 1941 and then another one right after [unclear].

E: Oh I was involved in all of the strikes. I didn't uh, I didn't go for the strikes. I went out because everybody else was going out. But I myself never thought you would gain anything by a strike. I went out a lot, I went with the crowd. I went with the crowd. In fact the last one I think I went out, I was one of the last ones out. I mean I wasn't going to stay in, but I was one of the last ones out. Because to me you never make the money that you've lost. You're always, to me you're always losing on strikes. But of course they did get a lot of things for us, you know, in the shop. Benefits for the working people.

S: Do you think the strikes helped to get those then?

E: Oh yeah, oh yeah. The unions did. Right, right. Yes.

S: So it might not have improved and you might not have made up the wages that you lost, but you did (--)

E: No, that's right. Yes, they improved on a lot of things. Yes.

S: Do you think (--) What do you think of the benefits at Sprague?

E: Well right now, well now they're not too badly. But now I work there forty-one, forty years. And when I retired, I retired at sixty-two because I didn't want to work till sixty-five. And actually I lost twenty dollars a month in my pension for retiring at sixty-two. [S: Hm] But I was only, I was, would have got a hundred and twenty dollars for three more years of work. So now I get a hundred and two dollars. Which is nothing compared to what the GE gets for their pensions. And of course and they get cost of living and everything else too, but we don't. And of course we tried, I tried. Even after I retired I started a couple of picket lines. Yeah [laughs], oh yeah!

S: To get the benefits (--)

E: For the retirees to get some benefits. You know, even the cost of living wage. [S: Oh yeah] Or even an increase on our pension. But of course see, the GE, those members have a lot of stock in the GE. [S: Oh] Where I don't think there's any of our retirees have any stock in the Sprague's.

S: So there hasn't been any sort of (--)0

E: So we can't attend none of their meetings or anything, [S: oh] cause we're not really a part of them.

S: Oh I see. So there's, (--)

E: Cause we don't have any stock.

S: There hasn't been a, there hasn't been an employee stock ownership plan that [unclear]?

E: No. Oh no, not at (--). No. No, no. When you retire, your retire. And they tell you how much you're going to get and that's it. You don't, it's not increased, or the cost of living isn't increased, or nothing. [S: Uh huh] Yeah.

S: Let me see what else I want to ask you here. [E: Yeah] Um, not did you get married at some point?

E: Oh yeah. Let's see, I got married in uh, 1956. [S: 1956] I think it was fifty-six. I was forty-four years old. Well I wanted to have my good times [S: oh yeah] before I got married. And then I said, little did I know the man that I was going to marry, he liked good times. So we just continued our good times. We both liked good times, so we went out all the time. And I worked, I worked right along, yeah.

S: Did he work at Sprague too?

E: No, no, no. He never worked at Sprague.

S: Where did he work?

E: He worked at the, when he retired he was at Scarpedo Lumber Yard. [S: Oh!] He worked outdoor jobs. You know, lumber yards? And at one time when his brother-in-law had the piggery, he used to drive the pigs to Boston. [S: Hm] And then they worked on the produce uh, it was more or less always outside you know, work. He used to um, I can't think of the name of the produce company he used to drive for. Yeah. But he worked in the Tannery for years. Yeah, he was, he worked up in [Reedsborough] Tannery and then he worked down here. And his father worked in the Tannery. The father, I think, was 76 years old when he died. And he had been retired for the Tannery, but he'd go over there every day just to check around. They let him in and let him walk around, because he had been working in the Tannery for years and years. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So that, that was sad. So I was married 15 years. Then my husband died, yeah. [S: Oh] Yeah, he was 66 I think. Of course he always said, "when I retire, when I retire, I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that." And I'd say, "you better wait for me to retire before, before you do this and that." [Laughs] But uh, he didn't, he wasn't retired long before he died. He had an embolism [S: Oh] that went to the brain. And this is when they discovered that he had this embolism, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. But the fifteen years that we were married we got along good. We had a lot of fights, lot of arguments. [S: Yeah] I can't say that everything was hunky dory, because it wasn't. And these people they say, oh we never have any arguments.

Hey, they don't tell me that. [S: That's right] Because I don't care how good they get along, there's always an argument.

S: And if they don't have any arguments, then something, something really, really wrong.

E: There's something, something is wrong. Something is not right.

S: When you're not communicating.

E: No way, no way. [S: Yeah] Oh my husband and I use to fight over the baseball games, the Yankees and Red Sox. [S: Oh, uh huh] I was Yankee, he was Red Sox [S: Oh!]. Oh ma! "Mother of the angels," I said! [Laughs] In fact, my sister used to live upstairs from us and she came down one night and, cause we were howling so much. And she said, "what's going on down here?" I said, "nothing, we're just arguing over the baseball game." [Laughs] She said, "my god it sounds like you two were killing each other." Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

S: What were, what were some of the happiest memories that you have from working at Sprague?

E: From working at Sprague?

S: Are there any particular times that stand out?

E: Not really. I, like I said, I enjoyed everything, everything. [S: Umhm] And we'd have our little birthday parties in there, you know, when it was somebody's birthday, or somebody was retiring. Or we'd all go have our Christmas parties. Am I yacking too much here? [S: Oh no, no, just keeping track of {unclear}] Yeah, our Christmas parties and the whole room would go to these Christmas parties. The whole room.

S: That would be during lunch hour?

E: No, no, this was after work.

S: Oh after work.

E: At night time, at night time.

S: Oh, I see, yeah. Did you have parties at work too, during lunch hour, or?

E: Oh yeah! Like I say, like a birthday party, or like, or we would send out for pizza, or grinders once a week. [S: Umhm] And we'd bring them in and that would you know, that would be in our lunch hour. And usually it was on a Thursday or a Friday, towards the end of the week. Yeah. But we did. I can truthfully say I had a lot, I enjoyed my work in the years that I worked in Sprague's. They say, "well you're stupid to say that." I said, "it's so." I enjoyed working. I didn't like getting up at 5 o'clock, but I did enjoy working. Yeah. And even we had arguments. Hey, before you know it you were, you were bound to have (--) I don't care, there's nobody

going to get along perfect, nobody.

S: Sure.

E: And so you have arguments. But the next day, this is the type we were, we would never hold a grudge. [S: Umhm] The next day you'd never know that there had been an argument, because everybody was friendly again. Nobody stopped. Every now and then someone would stop speaking to somebody, because they felt as if they were being picked on, or whatever you want to call it. Yeah.

side one ends

side two begins

Side two begins with interviewer in mid-sentence:

S: Like one big happy family at, or at least one big family.

E: Yeah, really!

S: At Sprague.

E: Especially towards, when we first, I first started working there and when I first moved out to Brown Street. But after that they came with this incentive program that no one understood.

S: Different than the first one. They had one recently, but then they had another one?

E: Right, right. Yeah. Yeah. Then they had another one. And it was (--) Then after that it wasn't a pleasure to work. It wasn't a pleasure to work.

S: And this was after World War II?

E: Oh yeah! Oh yeah, yeah.

S: We're looking at the fifties, or even the sixties.

E: See this was maybe five or six years before I retired. [S: Oh] Yeah. It was, it was different.

S: How was it different?

E: Well because no one would speak. You know, they're all busy working trying to make this uh, percentage. Trying to make the percentage. And they would watch what the next one was doing. You know? And this is when I was hoping I'd go on a day work job so I wouldn't have to bother telling nobody what I was doing and what I wasn't doing. Really. Yeah. No, you could see it gradually. And they stopped the music, no more music. Yeah.

S: About that same time?

E: Yeah, yeah. And uh, there was a lot of little things. Uh, every day things that would, you wouldn't notice it right away.

S: Can you think of a [both speaking at same time, cannot transcribe rest of comment].

E: No, really I can't. I really can't. I really can't. I really (--) I'll tell you the music.

S: The music, yeah.

E: Yeah, the music.

S: But you, did you feel like you were just a little more regimented, or a little more, you didn't have quite as much freedom, or (--)

E: No you didn't, you didn't.

S: No. [E: Really, you didn't] That people were watching over you a little bit more.

E: Were watching, right, right, right.

S: And your co-workers were also ?

E: Were all the same, because they, it was harder to make your percentage for the day. [S: Yeah] It was harder. The rates went up a little more. And so therefore, hey, we're all there to work for money. So you more or less tend to your business to make this extra money. So you're not going to be talking, or fooling around, or going for a walk. [Laughs] Yeah, to the ladies [S: or hang out in the {unclear}], yeah, right, right. Right. Yeah.

S: Was that one of the reasons that you decided to take early retirement, because [unclear]?

E: No. The reason I (--) All of my friends, I had a lot of friends that retired. And they waited until they were sixty-five. And uh, of course right now I can't say who it was, or anything, but they weren't even out a year and they would pass away. [S: Hm] They'd become sick. And I said, "no way is that going to happen to me!" At least I'm going to quit at sixty-two and enjoy my retirement. I says, "even if I have to enjoy just three years."

In fact there's a woman on the floor here, right in this apartment house, um, she retired just before I did. And that girl has been sick! After she retired she has been sick ever since.

Although she's still living. She's seventy-five like I am. And, but she is six years in the wheel chair. She has sugar. She has everything. You name it and she's got it. But she's still living, but she is in the wheel chair. In fact, she just had, was in the hospital for ten days. Sugar shock. They kept her ten days up there. And she came home just one day last week. Last Friday she came home. And she's had another shock since she's been home. Of course she has to have her orange juice and sugar right there, you know. Yeah. But, and this is it. I says, all of my friends

that are retiring at sixty-five, they're not living. So I said, "I'm going to have three good years [S: umhm] before I die." [Laughs]

S: Look at all of the years you've had.

E: Right. And I have enjoyed every bit of it.

S: Umhm.

E: I (--) And some of them say, "oh gee, what do you do? There's nothing to do. The days are so long." I don't know how they can say that. My days are not long enough for me. [S: Umhm] My days are not long enough. Between one club (--) That's what I say, I joined every club that was around. I gave, I gave up two of them, because I just couldn't keep it up. [S: Umhm] Because uh, when I belong to a club I'm very active in it. And this is why I join, to be active. And this is what I am, I'm active. I wasn't here three months and they made me an officer in the club here.

S: Oh really?

E: Right. I said, "no." I said, "I've got too much to do." They wanted me to be president. [S: Really?] They have a tenants association here. And they meet once a month.

S: And they own the building?

E: No, no. [S: No] It's just that we belong to the association. And uh, we pay a dollar dues a month. Then we go on little trips, or like that. We have a Christmas party. So I, like I said, it will be just a year that I've been here in May, and they had, they start getting their officers lined up. And then December is when the new officers take over. And she says to me, "would you be our president?" I said, "no way!" I don't know anybody here to begin with. And I don't know what the uh, the procedure of the president here is. I said, "let me get use to the place first." [S: Sure] It took me six months to get settled. I kept telling them it was going to take me six months, because I'd go outside and sit when it was nice. I didn't care whether I was settled or not, as long as I had my bed to go in. I didn't care. It did, it took me (--) And I was kidding when I says it's going to take me six months. I had boxes in this apartment for six months after I moved in here. But I finally got rid of them. They used to laugh. I said, "I don't care, the boxes are there. Nobody is going to take them unless I do." I'd rather sit outside, enjoy myself. Fraternize with the people. Well that's how I get to meet everybody, you know?

S: Sure, I know.

E: Now I know almost everybody in the unit around here. Yeah.

S: Umhm. Well that must feel great too.

E: Yeah. [S: Yeah] I can call them by their first names and everything. And this is, this is what I like. I like it. Yeah.

S: That's neat. Can you say something about what it was like during the big strike in 1970? The last, the last big strike which I guess was the biggest strike that Sprague, that Sprague ever had.

E: Oh, what the hell am I sticking on?

S: Um, what that was like for you? What you remember about it?

E: That was just (--) I really don't remember that much about it. That I know I didn't go picket the lines. I didn't go picket the lines. [S: Umhm] No, I didn't go picket at all. [S: Umhm] I was working down Brown Street then. [S: Umhm] I did go a couple of times, but then that was it. No. And uh, oh I worked in the kitchen part. We'd get the coffee and donuts ready. [S: Oh!] This was (--) In stead of picketing I would work. They had a hall on Main Street. And I can't think of the name of the hall where we used to make coffee.

S: That was the IUE? Was it IUE?

E: Yeah, it was the IUE, but they were renting [S: Oh, I see] this hall. They were at the time, excuse me, they were renting this hall. And we used to make coffee and get the donuts ready to bring to the pickets that were outside. Yeah. No, I didn't (--) But you had to be up there you know, five o'clock in the morning. But I'd rather, I had rather had done that than go picket really.

S: Oh yeah. Well that's, that's important to.

E: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

S: Got to have coffee and donuts!

E: Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah.

S: What do you think the affect of that strike was? Do you think it(--) What affect to you think it had?

E: I don't know really. I really, I can't remember really. I know that to me we went back and lost money. I know that much really. So if they get a few added things, they're not that big that it impressed me. [S: Yeah] It did not impress me. Yeah..

S: Because it too you (--) Even with like a 6% wage increase you still, you've lost all of that money.

E: Well you still wouldn't make (--) You gave (--) Right, right. You lose, you lose.

S: Did you get, did you get strike funds? Strike benefits?

E: No! I know I never got any.

S: While you were on strike you didn't get any kind, any, any strike (--)

E: No, I never, I never did.

S: No, so you had to live on whatever. Was that hard to get along during that, during that process?

E: What? Oh yeah, yeah. Oh yes. Yeah.

S: So you really stretched your savings.

E: Oh sure, sure!

S: Hm. [E: yeah] What did you think of the union apart from the strike? Did you, did you like the union [unclear]?

E: Well I, I was active in that too.

S: Oh, you were. In the I, in the IUE?

E: You see, this is it. Yeah, yeah. [S: Oh] See, I was uh, one of the stewards too at one time.

S: At Brown Street?

E: Yeah, yeah. [S: Oh! Oh!] See, whatever I join I always like to take some kind of part in it.

S: Right. Right. Right.

E: You know, I've got to keep my nose into these things. [Both laugh]

S: What did you do in the union? You were (--) What do you do as a (--) What did you do as a steward?

E: When anybody ever had a complaint they would go to you. And you would take it, when they had their meetings you would bring this up. The complaints. And of course you'd have a list like yeah long.

S: Were there quite a lot of complaints?

E: Yeah, yeah. Someone was always complaining. [S: Yeah] Then of course you had to go have a special meeting, and this and that. I gave it up anyway. I gave it up.

S: Did you like the other, other union officers?

E: Oh yeah, yeah. In fact I still know quite a few of them. But of course now they, they're younger ones now, so I don't know the (--) Outside of the president and uh, that Ray Bass, I

know him. [S: Yeah, (unclear)] Well I know him through our retirees union too.

S: Right, right.

E: Because they always had someone come down from the, the local union at our retirees meeting. They were always (--) But lately they haven't. No one's been there like uh, a coordinator, you know? [Y: Yeah] But uh, no one has been there since. It's been quite a few years.

S: Oh really?

E: Yeah. yeah.

S: Hm. [E: Yeah, yeah] And then um, do you think the strike had, the strike, that big strike had, had anything to do with Sprague deciding to leave the area, shut [unclear] plant?

E: I don't think so. I don't think so. You know, Sprague was Sprague until they started selling to these other big companies. [S: Umhm] Like the, what is it? Uh, [S: Penn Central?] right. And then there was another one. [S: General Cable?] Yeah. Uh, when they start selling to those companies, it was not Sprague's no more. [S: Umhm] No more. You couldn't even talk you know, at their meetings. [S: Umhm] Because it's these other companies that uh, got control. They got control over Sprague's. No.

S: Well some people say that, that John Sprague never liked this area and that he, that he didn't like North Adams, and he wants (--)

E: Well that (--) For John Sprague, I don't know. I don't know nothing about him. I never had anything to do with him. And uh, now I don't know where they get this from, but evidently somebody from the higher office must have got that he don't like this, and he don't like (--) Because the regular production person does not get to know these monkey, these monkey monks. They don't. [S: Yeah] Although I will say that Mr. Sprague himself, the old man used to come around every now and then, visit all of the departments. [S: Uh huh] Yeah, he used to come around. He did. All of the departments. I remember even up Beaver Street and even down Brown Street. Every now and then. You never knew when he was coming, but he would come in. And then they had this Jack Washburn. [S: Oh yeah] Yeah. Jack Washburn was always visiting the plant. Always.

S: And they were both friendly, pleasant?

E: Oh very. They would stop and talk to people. Oh yes! Oh yes! More so Jack Washburn. Or, there wasn't one person that didn't like Jack, really. Very, very nice fellow. Yeah. But after, when, like I said, when I retired I hadn't seen any big wheels, as we used to call them, come down to visit you know, each department. They might have been there, but it wasn't know that they were there. [S: Yeah.] It wasn't known that they were there.

S: It could probably be that Sprague was getting so much bigger that they, and they had plants

all over the world.

E: Well this is it, this is it. See, when you're a smaller concern [S: right] it's more friendly, isn't it? [S: Right] The same with clubs. [S: Right] When you're small, people are closer together. They're friendlier. When you start expanding, bye bye. [Laughs] Yup, yeah.

S: A lot of people have very high regards for Robert Sprague, Robert T. Sprague.

E: Oh yeah, the old man, the father. Oh yes! Oh yes! Yeah.

S: People seem very loyal to him.

E: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Yeah. Cause he was a regular guy. Like I said, he used to come and talk to the people. And the ones underneath him, they never did, [S: yeah] outside of Jack Washburn. He, he used to come around. [S: Yeah] Oh here comes Jack, and everybody is, "hi Jack?!" You know, you call them by their first name. Course Robert Sprague, nobody called him Robert. "Hi Mr. Sprague." And he would stop and talk. He would! But none of his sons ever did it. And even that Neil Welch, he never did it. And um, who used to come around was this Frank Wilson. He was up there. I guess he married one of the Sprague girls this Wilson. He's from Williamstown. They used to call him Tank Wilson. [S: Oh yeah!] He was quite a sportsman in college. [S: I knew him] Yeah. [S: I knew him when I was (--)] He was quite a sportsman in college. [S: Wow] He was a big fellow. [S: Yeah] But uh, Tank. Yeah.

S: Oh I remember, oh I remember him very well. Yeah, I think I knew, I think I knew his kids.

E: Yeah. And he uh, he used to come around quite a bit. [S: Hm] And in fact, whenever we had a party we always invited him.

S: What was his job? He was some kind of [unclear]?

E: Um, he was hunky monkey, you know, high, high up. [Laughs] High up, yeah. Of course they always said he got his job because he, he married Sprague's daughter and this and that. You know, this is, they use to say it. They'd say, "he's not smart, he's dumb." [Both laugh]

S: He may be smart to marry the Sprague family.

E: [Laughs] Yeah. Yeah.

S: Let's see [unclear].

E: Cause, they came, he came in right after, out of college. Tank Wilson? And I was trying to think of who the other one was that came in with him at the same time. There was two of them. And they came in as the, you know, they had higher-up jobs. Yeah.

S: Hm. Any other memories that you have of Sprague, or any stories that you have at Sprague?

E: Well I could, I suppose if I ever think way back, but right now I can't. You know, everything is a blank. [Laughs] If somebody should mention a certain thing [S: right], oh then I would remember. Because even during the war we used to have parties down at uh, Sprague's used to put the parties for uh, for everybody, the whole plant.

S: No, the comp, the company would [E: the company, yes] put up the cost of the party.

E: Would have a dance. Then they'd have these, all of these programs where they received a plaque, you know?

S: [Unclear] the "E", the "E" award.

E: The big (--) Yeah, right, right! Yeah.

S: So you had more parties during the war than at other times?

E: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Cause every, it seemed like every time you turned around there, somebody was getting an award. And everybody was invited. They used to have them down the, Armory. [S: Oh!] The State Armory. Yeah. Yeah.

S: So those must have been pretty big, pretty big wild parties?

E: Um, oh yeah. They had big parties. Yeah. And like I said, almost everybody showed up there. Yeah. Yup.

S: It seems like Sprague had a lot, the company had a lot of clubs, like bowling clubs and baseball, hunting and fishing and all (--) [E: Oh] I mean, I, I've been reading through the Sprague Logue [E: yeah, yeah, yeah] and I'm just amazed that there was so much going on. It's like [E: oh yeah] this big community of people. Um, do you think that was? Was that, was that what the employee, [E: that was Sprague] you think the employees, [E: yeah, that's the employees, right] do you think it was their idea to do that, or do you think the managers decided all this.

E: No, I think it was the employees [S: it was the employees] that really wanted to do it. And uh, and the managers backed them up. [S: Yeah] Hey, it's carrying their name. But this was before [S: Yeah, but it was] it was Sprague's. You know, not these other companies. These big companies that bought Sprague out, [S: oh yeah] or came in with Sprague's. After they came in to me everything was changed. [S: Yeah] Yeah. I don't even know if they have a softball team anymore. They used to.

S: But that was after you retired. Like the whole time, the whole time [E: oh yeah, after. Oh yeah, this is] you worked there it just seems like there was so much going, with all of these clubs.

E: Oh yeah, and bowl, and bowl, lot of bowling.

S: Yeah, yeah.

E: Yeah, and the women's team and the men's team, and (--)

S: So you think that was, think that was the workers themselves who, who organized [E: oh, who did that? Oh yeah. Oh yeah.] these clubs?

E: Then they got the banking, backing from the company, you know?

S: Yeah, yeah.

E: Right, right. But now if they have anything, they have to have all different backers. You know, like I say, even now the "Sons of Italy" has backed the Drury Band. [S: Hm] In fact they even sent, they went down to uh, South Carolina. The bank did. [S: Wow!] They were invited down there. And uh, and even I think the Jazz Band. And the Cheerleaders. They all went down. Of course they have to work for this money in order to get down there. And I know the "Sons of Italy" gave them three thousand dollars [S: really!] to go down there. But they helped the "Sons of Italy" out too, in their own little way. They helped the "Sons of Italy" out. [S: Hm.] Yeah. They come down and worked in the kitchen. And I work in the kitchen for Bingo, on Bingo. See, this is through Bingo that they're able to do these things. [S: Oh, I see] Because this money has to, this goes to charity. The kids don't get no money, but, and I know that, that they even paid seventeen hundred dollars for uniforms for them. [S: Hm] Through the bingo on the "Sons of Italy". But the kids come down and work in the kitchen for me. Of course they can't go out on the floor, because you've got to be eighteen to work outside on the floor. But they, every, once a month I have four people from the Drury Band that comes down and helps in the kitchen. [S: Really?] Yeah. And some of those kids are really nice. [S: Yeah] And they have different organizations that they help out, but you know, through uh (--) You, they've got to have backers. [S: Umhm, right] See, they've got to have backers. And Sprague used to back all of these people up. Now it's not Sprague no more. It's all of these high falutent companies, and they care less what goes on in your little town. [S: Right] They care less. They're too big a concern, too big. Too big. Yeah. You know, there's that, that closeness is not there. [S: Right] It's not there.

S: And that's what you really had at Sprague.

E: Yeah, this is what we had. Hey, when I worked this is what we had. Everybody was close together. Yeah. And like I said, when anything ever expands, it's not the same as when it was small. Is when it was small. Yeah. Because I know even the Italian Catholic Girls Club, they don't allow more than fifty member. [S: Oh!] They cut, their cut-off is at fifty.

S: Are you a member of that?

E: I was, but I got out of it. Hey, I had too! [S: Yeah] I had too many things! [S: Right] I had too many things. Yeah, I belonged to that for quite a few years. Yeah, even (--)

S: Why do you think it is that, that almost all of the clubs around here, like the IUE Retirees Clubs and the, and the uh, The American Association of Retired People, they're almost

completely women? There are hardly any men.

E: Any men. I don't know. Well the men figure that uh, you know, they don't want to go where all of the women are. There's too many women around. Even IUE. Hey, you can count the men.

S: I know. I was more surprised when I spoke to that day.

E: Yeah, well (--) And, but the biggest part are widows. [S: Oh, I see] The biggest part. There's not very men, very few men, people that are husband and wife. [S: Oh] There's not many. They're mostly all widows. [S: Hm.] That's like this gang that I hang around with. At one time there was twelve of us. The husbands and wives. We use to go out, not every Saturday, but every now and then we'd go off. The whole twelve of us would go out to dinner. [S: Oh really? Oh, that's great] Go out to dinner and uh, dancing. And before you know it, we still go out, but it's the five women, the five women go out Wednesdays, once a month. [S: Oh] We usually got over to Howard Johnson's. The husband are all dead. [S: Oh, really] It's just the women. Yeah. And we still do it, we still do it. In fact I had a picture here. I wonder if I still got it there that I could show you. I keep it here. I can keep talking while I'm looking at, unless there's something else you want to (--)

S: Yeah. See what else I want to (--) I think I've covered just about everything.

E: I enjoyed this.

S: Oh, I do to. I've learned, I always learn so much.

E: Yeah [laughs].

S: Well let me ask you about (--) Did women, did the wages that women make, were they about the same as what men did for the same kind of work?

E: Oh, I don't think so. You know um, that's one thing. Nobody said what they got, or what they didn't get.

S: Even if they made a straight wage, nobody, they wouldn't talk about it?

E: Yeah, nobody really said, no. [S: Oh] My sis, look at my sister. This is her husband, was her husband. [S: Oh] He died just about a year in July. [S: Oh] And this was my husband. [S: Oh] The four of us. Titi found that picture someplace. I don't know where she found it. Oh here we are.

S: But, but this isn't your sister here?

E: Yeah, that's Titi.

S: That's Titi and that's you?

E: Yeah, and this is me. [S: Oh] Oh you never saw me when I was a hundred and thirty pound. [Laughs] They say, "what happened?" That was me. I was starting to put on the weight.

S: Wow, and this is your husband?

E: Yeah, and that's my husband. [S: Oh boy] Yeah. This was Titi's husband.

S: Now were they, were they part of the twelve people that (--)

E: No, yeah, oh yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. [S: Oh that's great] See, there we are. Now [S: Oh, oh] this was taken, this was taken down in Lanesboro. This fellow, that's Ray Burdick. His wife died and he remarried. There's my sister [S: Oh], and there's Jesse, and this fellow died two years ago. And this is his wife. And there I am. And this Rita, there's her husband there. But these two are dead. That's Bob and that's this fellow's wife. They're all (--) Actually there just, just women there, outside of, outside of him.

S: Yeah, that's right. That's right.

E: Yeah. [S: yeah] And that was taken in I think, 1983.

S: 1983, oh yeah.

E: Yeah, yeah. [S: Hm] Yeah. So now it's just these women that go out. [Laughs] Once a month.

S: Well that must, that must still be a lot of fun?

E: Oh yeah, we do, we enjoy it. Yeah, we enjoy it. We usually go over Howard Johnson's.

S: And these were people that mostly worked at Sprague?

E: Oh, yeah. Oh yeah! Cookie did. I don't know about Rita, but Jesse, well she'd never, she and her husband had a photography place. [S: Oh] And then uh, they were very big into it, into photography. And then uh, he was a paratrooper in the army. And uh, he got hurt and then he passed away. But he was still doing all of his photography. [S: Oh] And in fact, she, she continued, not taking pictures, but she worked over at the art, the institute over in Williamstown. [S: Oh] She did a lot of work over there for them. [S: Huh] Yeah, yeah. You know, in the photo line. Yeah. In fact, she just uh, quite there about a year. She's gone into real estate now. [S: Oh] She's buying up all of these places and she took a lot (--) Her husband had a lot of money out in uh, bonds and things. And she put, cashed them all in and she's going into buying real estate. Yeah. So that's it.

S: Yeah. Now did you um, did you know any people who, who worked on making gas masks at, at Sprague's [unclear]?

E: No. No, I was up the Beaver then. And actually (--)

S: Did they, did they make bombs there too and the Brown Street plant?

E: Not that I know of. I don't know really.

S: [Unclear?] Because I read something in the Logue about, [E: Oh!] about incendiary bombs that were dropped on Japan that were actually made at the Beaver Street Plant. [E: Oh, that I couldn't tell you really] So I'm trying to find out more about that.

E: No. No. I really couldn't tell you.

S: Let me see if there is anything else we can (--). You don't know what Vitamin Q, there is, I read something about the Vitamin Q. Did that? I was wondering what that might be.

E: That's a blank in me.

S: Well that's, I just (--)

E: No, that's a blank.

S: And, the canister line? Did you ever hear of the canister line?

E: No, see, this is it.

S: I'm wondering if that might be what they called these bomb kind of factories?

E: No, I think that's uh, one of the newer things and uh, I don't know nothing about that. I think that was done maybe over Marshall Street.

S: Yeah. When did Marshall Street begin? Was that during, during World War II? Sometime?

E: Oh yeah, yeah. I was trying to think. I can't really remember. Yeah. I can't really remember. Yeah.

S: Okay, well I think that's everything I wanted to ask you.

E: Well. [S: Yup] I enjoyed it. [Laughs]

S: Maybe I could just ask you one other thing. That is, can you think, and you've already probably answered this in other ways, but can you think of what were the main ways that working at Sprague's was different when you left, when you retired, from when you started? Like forty years. Like what, in those forty years, what, what were some of the biggest changes that happened at Sprague?

E: Oh boy. [Laughs] Well like I say, the incentive program changed. I know that much. [S:

Yeah] I know that much. It did change. But of course they, they got, went into all of these other new things, so. And actually I don't know anything about that really. Yeah. Because even um, as we, we were, you're just interested in what you're doing. You don't care what the next department's doing, unless you get the work from them. Like say the rollers. The girls that used to role these things up, sections, or whatever. And then you got them. Then you know a little something about their department. But out, if you didn't have anything to do with them, you wouldn't know. [S: right] After they left you, you don't know where they went to. [S: Right, right] Where they sent to.

S: And now I think you told me, but what was the department at Brown Street where you worked?

E: Oh um, well I know one of the departments was the Color Coding Department, [S: The Color Coding Department, right] and the Sandia Department. [S: Sandia Department, yeah {unclear}] And I know they have, when I first went down there was a Resistor Department there. [S: And you worked there?] I didn't work in the Resistor Department, but I worked around the resistors after they were rolled. We use to color code them.

S: Oh, I see. [E: Yeah] What department?

E: And some of them I found in some of my radios, those little resistors, [S: Oh really?] television. [S: Oh!] In the radio and television, the little resistor. [S: Does it say Sprague?] Yeah, yeah.

S: Oh that's great! [E: Yeah, yeah] What department were you working in when you retired?

E: Well I was in, oh! Not paper rolling. See, I was in by myself. They had a fancy name for it.

S: Was that the paper cutting?

E: Paper cutting, yeah. But oh, the name that they had in there was not paper cutting. [S: Yeah] Of course I always said paper cutting. [S: Right] What they called it is something else. [S: Right] But to me it was just cutting all of these papers up. Different lengths and different [S: different size] yeah, sizes.

S: Yeah. [E: Yeah] So that's kind of like paper rolling, isn't it? Isn't that, isn't that kind of what they do at the paper rolling department, or is that really different?

E: Oh no, the paper rolling is different.

S: That's really different.

E: They, they have these rolls. See, um, they have this paper on rolls. [S: Oh, I see] It's all different size rolls. Now on the paper rolling, I worked seven weeks on that. [S: oh] That's how I know about that. You have to line your machine with these five or six papers. Five or six rolls. And you have to line them up. And then they roll. You get so many turns on them. And

then they put a little piece of foil in and then a little more, and then they put a piece of foil in. And uh, and they roll, then makes the condensor. And of course they had all different sizes. But on these machines, some machines were big machines, where they had seven or eight rolls of paper on. And then when that paper was gone you had to put a new roll in. You know, had to know just where it went. And I was on there for seven weeks. I never found out where the (--) You know what I do, when I see one roll getting small, I would take up a new one and put it in there and follow it. As I'm taking off the old one I'm putting the new one in. [Laughs] That's how I learned how to set up your machine.

S: That was a good way to do it.

E: Right, because otherwise to me it was all Greek. And where people have (--) My sister worked on rolling, paper rolling. She worked on it for quite a few years. Yeah, yeah. She worked nights too on paper rolling. Yeah. And as you roll each condenser, it shows on the machine. [S: Oh, I see] That one and two and three, how many are done, yeah. Yeah. Yeah..

S: Okay. Well, unless you can think of something else that you'd like to say, [E: no actually] I think that's all I have to ask you.

E: Yup.

S: This is great! I feel like I get a real education every time, every time I talk [E: everytime you talk to somebody.] to you.

E: [Laughs] And of course, like I say, like Titi worked in the lab part and everything, which was all different from what I was doing. There was no, I don't think there was no incentive work there. It was just uh, yeah. She used to have to wear a hat and gloves in the cold.

S: Right. Yeah, she told me about that. [E: Yeah, yeah] I talked to her last week and she told me all about that. [E: Yup] Well we're trying to talk with people who worked in all different departments [E: departments, yeah] and all different jobs to get a complete picture of you know, what, what it was like.

E: Yeah, yeah. And she said how this Ann Tibert was done there, huh? [S: Yes, yes.] And you got another view of something else, yeah.

S: Someone, someone [unclear] heard, yeah.

E: She was a smart girl that girl. Yeah. Yeah. They got, they did get rid of a lot of smart people. A lot of people that knew what they were doing. [S: Oh I know. That was, that was a mistake] Yeah, they did. They did really. [S: That was a mistake.] Really, yup. Now can I give you a cup of coffee? Would you like (--)

END OF TAPE